

Statement of

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.

United States Senator

Delaware

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Chairman Leahy, thank you for calling this important and timely hearing on strategies for combating violent crime and the lessons we can draw from recent experience. You have assembled an impressive panel of witnesses who will assist the development of a crime-fighting strategy that will ensure the safety of our communities in the 21st century.

If experience tells us anything, it is that there is no single cure that will eliminate violent crime in America or anywhere else for that matter. Not too long ago, however, we began to successfully address violent crime in our nation.

Back in the nineties we faced a terrible crime crisis. In 1994, Congress passed the Biden Crime Bill, and it transformed the federal approach to fighting crime. It expanded the Drug Courts, so that non-violent small-time offenders received treatment and strict monitoring, rather than jail terms. It launched the Violence Against Women Act. And it used a three-part approach to fighting crime that proved an effective response to the crime wave of the 1990s:

? investing in prevention and recidivism programs, such as those championed by Professor Jeremy Travis;

? dedicating Federal support to the types of community-oriented policing tactics that Colonel Dean Esserman has so deftly initiated in Providence, Rhode Island; and

? ensuring that offenders serve tough-but-fair prison sentences.

Crime dropped for eight consecutive years. Violent crime and murder rates dropped more than 30 percent. Thus, if there is one thing we should have learned by now, it is that we need an aggressive and comprehensive approach to fighting crime.

Unfortunately, the current Administration has abandoned this approach and crime, once again, is on the rise. Since 2004, violent crime is up 2.8 percent, murders are up 2.5 percent, and robbery is up 9.9 percent. Many of our cities - Boston, Cincinnati, Houston, Oklahoma City, and Pittsburgh, just to name a few - have seen double digit growth in their murder rates. Last year, there were 17,000 murders in the United States. That is too many for a civil society.

You all know better than anyone that fighting crime takes a strong and steady commitment. We built a solid foundation for fighting crime in the 1990s. Now, we must restore that foundation, which has been steadily eroded and chipped away at for the past eight years, and refine and update it so that we have a comprehensive crime fighting strategy for the 21st Century. With the help of law enforcement, including the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, and the National Association of Police Organizations, I have begun to develop such a strategy. Among other things, this strategy:

? Revitalizes the COPS program by authorizing \$1.15 billion per year for the next 6 years, adding 50,000 new officers, new technology and equipment for officers, and \$200 per year to hire and train community prosecutors.

? Restores the FBI's and DEA's crime fighting capabilities by adding 1,000 FBI agents to focus on violent crime and 500 DEA agents to focus on drug trafficking.

? Protects communities by reducing recidivism by authorizing over \$1 billion for reentry programs under the Second Chance Act.

? Increases enforcement against gangs by amending the federal criminal code to define and expanding prohibitions and penalties against criminal street gangs.

? Ensures that state and local law enforcement and criminal justice officials input felony warrants into the federal database, that all such officials have access to that database, and that the extradition task forces the U.S. Marshal's service operates in conjunction with State and local law enforcement have sufficient resources to extradite violent fugitives to face justice.

? Expands and strengthens the Internet Crimes Against Children task force program to investigate and prosecute those who use 21st century technology to abuse and exploit children.

? Invests in youth prevention and intervention strategies by authorizing federal resources to deter and prevent seriously at-risk youth from joining and remaining in illegal gangs - a total of \$849 million over the next four years is authorized for these purposes.

? Establishes State and local law enforcement as a full partner in developing homeland security strategy and ensures that law enforcement has the funding, support, resources, and intelligence sharing necessary to respond to terrorist attacks and major incidents.

Fighting crime takes an unflagging commitment, a strong federal, state and local partnership, and a constant vigilance to ensure an effective response to new forms of criminal activity and evolutions in criminal tradecraft. Hearings like the one the Chairman has called today are an essential part of this process. We must rebuild the strong foundation that brought crime down in the 1990s, refine that approach based on the experience of law enforcement officers and the expertise of criminologists, and update it to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues, with my friends in State and local law enforcement, and with experts like those here today to once again make our communities safe places to raise a family, to send a child to school, to work an honest job, or to run a small business. Together, we can build an effective, comprehensive crime control strategy for the 21st century.